

Message Text

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR,UR

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF SHARING VOA/RADIO LIBERTY

FOR ARMITAGE FROM AMBASSADOR

REF: STATE 204789

1. REGRET DELAY IN REPLYING TO REFTEL. I AND OTHERS HEVER HAVE CONTINUED TO GIVE MATTER CAREFUL THOUGHT, BUT WE FIND IT EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT TO MAKE INFORMED JUDGEMENT ON MATTER WHICH MAY BE AFFECTED SUBSTANTIALY BY EVENTS WHICH COULD TRANSPIRE BEFORE IT COMES INTO EFFECT, AND ABOUT WHICH WE HAVE BEEN PROVIDED FEW DETAILS. AT THE MOMENT IT WOULD SEEM TO ME THAT IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE TO ACCEPT A SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION OF RL BROADCAST TIME AND SIGNAL STRENGTH--PARTICULARLY IF IT IS TEMPORARY-- RATHER THAN USING SHARED FACILITIES WITH VOA. THE LATTER COURSE WOULD INEVITABLY AFFECT VOA'S EFFECTIVENESS AND POSSIBLY ENDANGER BROADER PROGRAMS HERE, ALL OF WHICH ARE THEMSELVES IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN THE POST-CSCE CONTEXT. I HAVE COME TO THIS CONCLUSION RELUCTANTLY, SINCE I FULLY RECOGNIZE RL'S GREAT VALUE AND ALSO THE POLITICAL IMPACT IN THE US OF A CUTBACK.

2. THIS IS STILL A HIGHLY TENTATIVE JUDGEMENT SINCE OUR CONSIDERATION OF THE MATTER IS HANDICAPPED BY IGNORANCE OF SOME OF THE BASIC FACTS. MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE DO NOT HAVE A GRASP OF WHAT THE PRECISE IMPACT ON RL AND VOA WILL BE

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UNDER THE VARIOUS ALTERNATIVES. SINCE FREQUENCY SHARING

WITH VOA WILL IN ITSELF PRESUMABLY RESULT IN A CUTBACK OF RL PRIME BROADCASTING TIME (AS WELL AS VOA PRIME BROADCASTING TIME), QUESTION APPEARS TO RELATE TO GREATER CUTBACK IF VOA FACILITIES ARE NOT USED, NOT TO WHETHER THERE WILL BE A CUTBACK. WE HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN GIVEN NO INDICATION OF WHAT THE MAGNITUDE OF THE DIFFERENTIAL MIGHT BE, OR THE DEGREE TO WHICH VOA BROADCASTING TIME WOULD BE AFFECTED. THE SAME CONSIDERATIONS APPLY TO RELATIVE SIGNAL STRENGTH. WITHOUT BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THESE MATTERS, WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER WE ARE FACING A DIFFERENTIAL IN THE ORDER OF, SAY, 20-30 PERCENT OR OF 80-90 PERCENT.

3. IN ASSESSING THE POSSIBLE IMPACT OF SHARED FACILITIES, INTERVENING EVENTS MAY BE CRUCIAL. A LOT MAY DEPEND ON THE GENERAL STATE OF US-SOVIET RELATIONS AT THE TIME SUCH ACTION MIGHT BE TAKEN. IT MAY MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE WHETHER THINGS ARE MORE OR LESS ON TRACK (I.E., SALT II, SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT, RECONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE) OR WHETHER RELATIONS ARE MORE STRAINED (E.G. NO RESOLUTION OF SALT II, SOVIET DISSATISFACTION WITH US POLICY IN ME. ETC.) IN FORMER CASE, SOVIETS WOULD BE LESS LIKELY TO USE ISSUE AS PRETEXT FOR CIRCUMSCRIBING USIA ACTIVITIES HERE; IN LATTER, THE RISKS WILL BE MUCH GREATER.

4. I WOULD HOPE THAT RL WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO MAKE THE MOST VIGOROUS ATTEMPT POSSIBLE TO SOLVE ITS TRANSMITTER PROBLEMS--BOTH SHORT AND LONG TERM--ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT SHARING FACILITIES WITH VOA WILL PROBABLY NOT BE AN AVAILABLE ALTERNATIVE. IF, DESPITE THESE EFFORTS, IT SUBSEQUENTLY BECOMES CLEAR THAT WE MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN THE VIRTUAL EXTINCTION OF RL AND SHARED FACILITIES, THE QUESTION SHOULD BE REVIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION EXISTING AT THAT TIME. I WILL, OF COURSE, APPRECIATE BEING KEPT INFORMED OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS REGARD, AND IN PARTICULAR WOULD WELCOME MORE INFORMATION ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF VARIOUS ALTERNATIVES FOR HOURS OF SERVICE, SIGNAL STRENGTH, AND TRANSMITTER LOCATION IN REGARD BOTH TO RL AND TO VOA.

STOESSEL

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